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Governors Bill Number 1017

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Former State Director of Emergency Management (DEMHS)

Before the Public Safety and Security Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

Speaking against Governor's Bill Number 1017

February 22, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, my name is Kerry L. Flaherty and I am the former State Director of Emergency Management. I had the pleasure of serving as State Director of Emergency Management when emergency management was part of the Connecticut Military Department and then the newly created Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.

I had the pleasure of working with and through many of you seated here before me today in creating a new "stand alone" state agency named the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS). As many of you may recall this new department was created to establish a clear direction as a "neutral broker" in Connecticut's preparation and preparedness to natural and manmade disasters. Previous to the development of DEMHS the Office Emergency Management was under the guidance of Connecticut's Military Department and Homeland Security was a division of the Department of Public Safety. Many local and state leaders felt that the interests of the fore mentioned agencies were competitive and conflicting in nature. Some of the proposed projects such as the "boat" for Long Island Sound became very polarized between the State and the municipalities and often pitted the interests of Connecticut State Police against the local emergency responder community.

Municipal leaders demanded a "neutral broker" to manage the "Homeland Security Grant Funds" and to have a voice in the guidance of the preparedness, planning, response and training programs that are associated with the United States Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. All of the federal grant funds are associated with project deliverables at the state and municipal level. DEMHS has done an outstanding job under the guidance of Commissioner Thomas and key agency program managers into building Connecticut's preparedness and response programs into a model for other states.

I had the opportunity to listen to Governor Malloy's Budget Address and agree in principal that in these very extreme economic times that reform of state government is necessary to streamline and reduce state spending. After carefully examining proposed Governor's Bill 1017 I see several areas of concern, especially the desire to subordinate DEMHS under the Department of Public Safety.

I have had and continue to have the opportunity to work with the outstanding leadership at the Department of Public Safety. The issue that concerns me most is the focus of the Department of Public Safety will be narrowed to terrorism intelligence gathering and other related programs such as SWAT and bomb squad equipment purchasing and training. The focus of DEMHS is on "Crisis and Consequent Management" to all potential natural and manmade disasters.

For the sake of efficient and streamlined government I feel it is time to go a step further with DEMHS as not only a separate entity but to look at the other state functions of firefighter training and certification, police standards and training, emergency medical training and licensure and emergency communications both telephonic and radio into and under the coordinating functions of DEMHS. This consolidation would coordinate State and municipal emergency response. This consolidation would leverage and enhance the preparedness of the emergency response community. Municipal and State partners should continue to work together at the "Coordinating Council". Additional layers of committees and working groups as proposed should be reexamined to determine the actual effectiveness of their proposed functions. It will allow the Commissioner of DEMHS direct and immediate access to the Governor when necessary.

Lastly and certainly with great concern my recollection of the creation of DEMHS, moving DEMHS under the Department of Public Safety will cause the shut down and administration of the grants process for up to 12 months while federal agencies will audit all unexpended funds that are supporting not only State initiatives but will undermine municipal projects that are about to enter their second grant cycle. Specifically I'm talking about the Urban Area Security Initiatives (UASI) that has a great impact on DEMHS regional planning.

In closing my experience at the municipal and state level clearly tells me that now is not the time to disassemble a proficient department as we approach the possibility and probability of significant Spring flooding that may rival the floods of 1955. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before you today.